Wiring Kits Never Come Presorted

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Wiring Kits Never Come Presorted

by Azure_K_Mello

Summary

The noises of construction get to Will. But, thankfully, he has crutches to get him through it. Things aren't as scary when you have help.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

The next day started brightly, the birds were awake, the sun was shining and Will only needed a light coat for his walk to work after letting the dogs wonder in the yard for a little while and kissing Hannibal goodbye. He avoided his new plot of land, didn't want to go just in case the construction crew was there. His first class went well, Alana had kept them on point and his students were where they should have been at that point in the curriculum. He had three classes back to back before lunch. Walking back over the fields he heard the noise of machinery. It made him flinch and in his house he sat on the ground in his living room to calm down and breathe.

Then he made himself half a sandwich to eat while walking the dogs. He took them over the fields, not into the woods. The noise still grated but he kept his eyes on the dogs. The house was going to take eight months. He was going to need to listen to the cacophony, live with the mechanical noise, for eight months. He threw toys for the dogs and watched his boys run after them. Back at the house, he texted Hannibal, "The construction noise is already getting to me. Is voodoo pasta too messy and lowbrow for you? I want comfort food but if you can't face voodoo pasta I will settle for Thai. There's a good Thai place."

He went back to class feeling slightly less great than he had in the morning. Half way through his next lecture his phone beeped and he took it out to read, never losing his train of thought as he spoke. Hannibal had written, "I would be pleased to try voodoo pasta but I'd like to see you make it as I know nothing about the dish."

Will texted back, "Sounds good. I'll see you at home after my appointment with Mort." He slid the phone into his pocket and kept talking. Glancing up he saw surprise on some faces. "You aren't allowed to make dinner plans while I'm teaching you. I, on the other hand, already know all about this and can teach it in my sleep. So, I can text." Some of his students laughed and Will relaxed into his day again. Once the class was over he sat at his desk for a few moments, breathing slowly before facing the noise.

He went home, walked and fed the dogs and took a fast shower before grabbing all of Mort's paperwork. The construction was still going on, he wondered when quitting time was. He drove listening to sounds of the bayou and parked in his old spot outside of Hannibal's office as it was a really short walk… across the street in fact. Inside he nodded to the receptionist and sat down to wait, he still felt agitated so he crossed his ankles and leaned his head back to breath, envisioning the air going through his nose and out of his toes.

After only a few minutes Mort came out and smiled. "Hey, Will." He took in Will's position and said, "You finish what you're doing and I'll look over my notes, remind myself of what we covered." Then Holly came and put her paws on Will's knees to greet him. He leaned forward to stroke her head and Mort sighed, "Holly, you ruined Will's exercise."

"She is such a beautiful dog, Mort."

"She is, but she ignores my treatment plans."

"We'll be fine here if you want to read your notes."

Mort shook his head, “I read the notes this morning. That was my way of making sure you finished your exercise without rushing or feeling you were inconveniencing me, which you weren’t. No doctor should ever feel irritated that their patient is using the treatment prescribed to them but some people feel they should rush so as not to waste my time. I assure you, while I don’t need to look over my notes I wouldn’t have minded a bit to wait a few minutes for you to get yourself straight.”

“I’m ready,” said Will, gently removing Holly’s paws and standing. They entered his office and when Will sat Holly instantly moved by his side.

“How are you, Will?”

“I’m pretty well, how are you?”

“I’m well, thank you. First things first: did your dad fill out that paperwork?”

“I filled it out. He read it and signed it.” Will handed it over. “He sent some paperwork for you too.”

“I love a man proactive in healthcare. What do you have for me?”

“The first is a note saying that you can prescribe me drugs without his permission but you need to email him to notify him and give him the drug information.”

Mort nodded, “Great, prescribing to a minor can be difficult.”

The second was a little embarrassing and Will said, “The other one is a contract he always gets my shrinks to sign. Please understand it’s not about you, not a judgement it’s just… it’s been a problem in the past. My dad says it’s better to cross this bridge long before we get to it so we don’t burn it down and call in lawyers. It’s not about not trusting you.”

“Okay,” nodded Mort.

“It’s a contract to say you won’t publish anything about me while I’m living and you won’t publish posthumously unless I’m dead too. If you write something and die while waiting for me to die you have to put a note in your will.”

“This has been a problem in the past?”

Will nodded, “It ended up with my dad, the cops and my school principal in a conference call with the Editor-in-Chief of Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology.”

“Dear lord, how old were you?”

“Fifteen, I didn’t want my head laid open in a journal.”

“Well, I don’t write very much, more interested in your results than talking about mine. I would never write about someone who didn’t want to be written about. And I would certainly not do that to a minor. So, I am more than happy to swear to that to give you some piece of mind. That doctor should have been struck off.”

“He actually went to prison. Not because of the paper, but he lost his license and went to prison.”

Mort laughed, “Good. People like that make other people distrust doctors.” He read over the documents as he spoke and said, “I’ll scan these, email them to your dad and you can give him the hard copy when you see him.”

“Thank you.”

“No, thank you. I always appreciate a level playing field and I want you to know that our talks go no further than you and me. I can talk to your dad if you want, I can talk to other doctors for advice for me to help you without using your name and — if things go terribly, frankly unforeseeably, wrong — I can talk to the cops. But talking about you for the sake of talking about you is completely unethical, immoral and unconscionable. You will never be the topic of discussion at a dinner party or a medical conference. I give you my word.”

“Thank you.”

“I know you said you don’t like psychoanalysis but if you ever want to talk about the more emotional side of things instead of the purely mechanical stuff, we can.”

“Thanks,” Will said.

“So, you were on vacation and I know it’s not the same as everyday life. But, have you been doing your breathing exercises?” Will nodded. “Good, now, for our first sessions we’ll be trying new things, swapping out exercises that don’t work or modifying ones that almost work. I’m your tips and tricks guy and I want to give you a full bag of tricks to use to get you through any situation. So, understanding that you haven’t used them in your usual routine, what’s working?”

“I really, really like the one where I sit on my living room floor and just look around. I have a really nice house.”

“The one where you sit on the floor? I don’t know which one you’re speaking about.”

“You told me to inhabit my space consciously.”

“And you spend a lot of time on that floor?”

“A couple of hours a night, tying flies, or working on motors.”

“Okay, and you like that exercise?”

“I have a really lovely house, filled with furniture I picked, art I like, possessions I own and gorgeous dogs I love. Usually I take that for granted. But sitting on the floor, looking around: I love my house. And now, when I’m alone, I like looking around my house more.”

“That’s fantastic. What about any of the work ones?”

“I’m not sure about those yet, I haven’t used them as much. I have got my morning one down but I had to alter it.”

“How so?”

“I have to tell myself I’m not alone in my bed.”

Mort tilted his head, “That sounds like it would be terrifying for you. Oh! It’s ‘cause of your dogs, of course.”

Will felt awkward saying it but he said, “The first time we had an appointment I was going to meet Hannibal for dinner.”

“I remember.”

“My dad thought we were dating, we were talking about how I was going to have to come clean. But I asked Hannibal if I was lying, if it wasn’t actually the truth… we were on that road for a long time. Now, I only sleep alone the night before Hannibal’s early morning and the night of his late sessions… for those three weeks I was his patient I went on his late night. I think it’s great that he has a late night and an early morning for his patients. I also like that two night a week I can eat cereal for dinner and sleep with the dogs in the bed.” He studied Mort, “Have I put you in an awkward position?”

“Why would you have?”

“He’s a colleague,” Will shrugged, looking at Holly as she put her head on his knee.

“I’ve always liked Hannibal. He’s a kind, soft spoken man. And that would seem like a good fit for you. But I am concerned that you don’t strike me as someone who really likes dating.”

Will nodded. “I don’t, I suck at it and get dumped pretty quickly, and it’s never broken my heart. But Hannibal’s different. I really like being with him and he really likes me. My dad was shocked seeing us together. He was touching my hair when I was talking and I wasn’t tense and usually, even when I like someone, I have to really work at contact. With him it’s not an issue, although it is nice not to have him at home every night. I like having those two nights to myself. And when I wake up and do my exercise he knows I’m awake but he doesn’t try to talk to me, just kisses my cheek and gets out of bed quietly. Unlike Holly, he respects your treatment plan. It’s nice not to date someone who views me as broken. And I like that exercise, it’s a nice way to start the day.”

“Good, what else?”

“There’s construction by my house, it only started today but the noise is already getting to me.”

“What kind of construction?” Will told him about buying the land and getting the plans and how excited he was but that the noise was awful. “You’ve been busy. Here’s what you’re going to do: make that noise an active part of your life through participation. It will be a lot less scary and irritating if you have it as a fully realized concept with an understood context

and not just something loud and mechanical too close to you haven. What time do they start?"

"After I go to work."

"What time do they finish?"

"I don't know, they were still going when I left to come here."

"Okay, after work tomorrow you drive to Dunkin' Donuts, you buy a Box O' Joe and a box of doughnuts. You go over there, introduce yourself, learn their names and ask to help. They won't want you helping on anything big because you don't have any experience-"

"I used to be a boat mechanic," Will says.

"Boats aren't houses, Will. They'll give you something small. They don't want you working on anything big but you're the boss so they'll give you a task. And I want you to sit there, do the job to the best of your ability and soak it in. Tell them you work for the FBI and you'd like to visit whenever you have the chance. Then anytime the noise starts to get to you just bring refreshments and throw your lot in with theirs. Make yourself a part of the noise. Then when you hear a mechanical beeping you'll think, 'That's the backhoe backing up to dig the foundation.' You'll hear a clank and think, 'Wow, John's so clumsy that's the fourth thing he's dropped today.' They won't be strange foreign sounds: they'll be the noises of your dad's house being built by people you know."

"Sounds like a good idea."

"Good, so have you had any nightmares or does having someone in bed stop that?"

"I've had one. I don't know if having Hannibal helps or not. Until I went back into the field I hadn't had a nightmare since I got stabbed in the French Quarter… before that I hadn't had a nightmare since I was a child. I never dreamed about anything, when I slept I just slept… I shouldn't be in the field."

Mort nodded, "I wrote that to the FBI. How did your nightmare treatment go?"

"It worked, one hundred percent. It was weird to turn on the lights. And then my dad came down while I was drinking the milk and I really didn't need him there, the ritual worked without him. I went right back to sleep."

"That's fantastic. I want to walk you through five new exercises and give you a schedule. Some exercises you're going to learn are daily, just like your morning exercise, others are specific to a day or a task, and others will be as needed. I want to make one thing very clear: just because they aren't pills doesn't mean your exercises aren't medication. If I gave you a pill that you had to take every twelve hours you wouldn't take it when it was convenient, would you?"

"No, I would take it every twelve hours."

“And if I gave you a pill to take before swimming to stop swimmer’s ear you wouldn’t take it after swimming, would you?”

“No, I would take it before.”

“And if I gave you a pill to stop excruciating pain you wouldn’t take it after the pain had passed, would you?”

“Of course not.”

“Those are exactly what I’m prescribing. I’m giving you a daily regiment to help you live on an even keel, methods to cope with specific triggers and emergency measures to deal with crises. I understand that, if it’s one in the afternoon and you’re chasing a bad guy with a gun you won’t be able to stop and do your lunch exercises where you contemplate your day so far, come up with your goals for the afternoon and plan out your next step. But, once that guy is in cuffs you don’t go to his interrogation right away, you sit down and do your exercise. And, if you’re in the lab and in the middle of calculating a time of death you can take a ten minute break — you really can — someone else can do that math. After those ten minutes, you will be much more focused — you’ll be better off and so will your work. If anyone asks what you’re doing tell them it’s a treatment plan from a doctor. And if anyone dares to say anything implying self-care is selfish, if anyone says you should do it on your own time, that you shouldn’t do it at work, that you need to prioritize, hand them one of these.” He reached for a stack of business cards he’d clearly set out for the purpose of the speech — a speech he’d most likely given in one form or another to hundreds of people. The card simply read: Dr. Mortimer Jacobs, M.D., Psy.D., Ph.D., Th.D. Underneath was his number. “Tell that person to call me. Don’t justify yourself. Don’t explain yourself. Just tell them to call me. And I will tell them what to do with their opinions.”

Will stared at the cards. “You have a lot of letters after your name. I’m only Will Graham B.S., M.Sc.”

“I went to school for a very long time,” agreed Mort. “Homework,” he said, holding out some paperwork, “These are instructions for what we did last week, and the five exercises we’re going to do today and a schedule. I would like for you, before our next meeting, to buy yourself a nice leather journal — something you would like to own for a long time. I want you to write out these exercises, writing things helps you learn them, write out the schedule with the times that work for you — when is your lunch time, when is three hours after you get out of bed, and so on. Each time we meet, I’ll be giving you new exercises, dropping or modifying ones you already have, adjusting the schedule. I’ll be giving you mantras and helping you find angles to approach problems from. I’ll be giving you actions, like getting to know your construction crew and contextualizing distressing unknowns. I want you to have both a record of your progress and a reference book for you to look things up in. We’re going to meet two times a month for the next six to eight months and we’re going to do a lot of work. After that we’ll change to once a month for about four months, then once every two months and so on until you’re checking in just for tune ups. It is going to be hard work and effort and your life is going to be so, so, so much easier when we’re done. You will have an arsenal of tricks and mantras to make it so that the only outward signs of your neurological issues are a dislike of handshakes and eye contact. Heck, maybe even those will be doable.

Make no mistake, there's no quick fix but we can make this something you live with easily instead of bear with grace."

"I've had a lot of doctors," said Will.

"I never would have guessed," said Mort with a smile. "It's SOP for patients to come into their second appointments with their own paperwork about drugs and confidentiality."

Will smiled at the slight mocking, genuinely amused, "You're the first that's made me feel like this could be something surmounted instead of coped with or worked around."

"You're not broken, Will, you just need the right tools. No one offered them to you."

"I've had a lot of drugs," Will said.

"You don't need drugs."

"I'm going to need some clonazepam for when I go to New Orleans for the Zydeco Festival. I have a big Southern family that likes physical contact."

"When is that?"

"In a couple of months."

Mort nodded, "In a couple of months we'll see if you need clonazepam. If you do need it as a backup I will be only too happy to write the script but, maybe, you won't need it. Let's see where we are then, okay?" Will nodded in agreement. "Great, on to the exercises."

They worked for the next forty minutes on the new exercises and when they were done Mort said, "Is this time good for you? We're looking at a long term commitment. I'd like for you to have a good appointment time."

"Would it maybe be possible to switch it to tomorrow night in the future? It's just that tomorrow night is my dad's poker night so we don't talk."

"That's fine; we can do that."

Will was surprised at the speed at which Mort agreed. "You don't have to rearrange any patients or look at your book?"

"Hannibal has his late night, you're mine. Any night is fine as you are my latest appointment of the week."

"Oh, I'm sorry about that. I didn't realize."

"It's fine, Will."

"I just feel badly now."

Mort sighed, "Y'know, I live in Wolf Trap. The colonial on Greenland Street?"

“The pale cream one with the green gingerbread and horseshoe driveway?” Will replied.

“That’s the one. I have a very nice study. Now, I don’t usually suggest this to patients because I usually work with people who are maybe not so level, but — as I know that you won’t murder, rob or stalk me — do you want to meet there? We could meet at the same time and both be home by a regular time. It’s okay if that makes you uncomfortable. We don’t have to.”

“Well, we could try it and if it works that would be great and if not, well, we could go back to this,” Will shrugged.

“I agree, completely. I know that these exercises take time so just start working them into your day. It’s best to learn them when you’re relaxed so that when you’re stressed you can just slip into it.”

“That’s what Hannibal said when I was going to forsake my morning breathing the first time he slept over.”

“I always knew Hannibal liked me as a person. I didn’t think he held me in high regards as a doctor. Then he sent me a friend he was on the path to dating and respects my treatment plan,” he stood and went to the door, their session was over and they would both soon be heading home to Wolf Trap.

“I get the feeling he mostly only refers people who are so nutty they scare him, or so messed up he feels he can’t help them,” said Will, standing and gently budging Holly off his feet where she had settled. “It could be that he likes you too much to inflict them on you but when he had a friend he knew he couldn’t help he pointed him in your direction. He would never have given me your name if he didn’t think highly of you: he wouldn’t have wasted my time.”

“You’re right. I need to email your dad,” he said, collecting the papers for Will. “All I’ll say in my email is that I’m me and that I’m returning his papers digitally while you have the hard copies. What happens in these sessions stays between us.”

“Thank you.” He patted Holly, “Goodnight, Holly. I’ll see you in two week, Mort. And thank you.”

“You are so welcome.”

“I can show myself out.”

“Thank you, goodnight. And bring your notebook next time.”

“Okay,” agreed Will before going to the door.

Outside he saw a man opening a car door on the street and said, “Hannibal?”

Hannibal looked up and smiled, “You must have had a long session.”

“I’m not sure, I wasn’t watching the clock. I told him about us. I hope that’s okay.”

“Of course, Will. You’re not a secret,” he put an arm around Will’s waist. “I was just about to drive to your house. I bought bread from a lovely little bakery. I was looking up voodoo pasta. I really hope the internet is wrong about how it’s made.”

“I don’t know what the internet told you.”

“It told me to add a jar of liquid cheese to the sauce.”

“I would never make you eat jarred liquid cheese,” Will promised. “Were you waiting for me?”

“No, just a happy accident. If you had tarried a moment longer I would have missed you. Maybe this can become a ritual: I’ll wait for you after your appointments.”

Will smiled and kissed him slowly, enjoying the feeling of closeness in the empty street. Pulling back he said, “This might have actually been my last appointment here.”

Hannibal raised an eyebrow. “I’m very sorry to hear that. I thought you had a nice time with Mort before.”

“Very nice time. But I’m his late night appointment and he lives in Wolf Trap. So, next time I’m going to his house and we’re going to see if I’m comfortable there because it would be much more convenient for us both.”

“That would be very useful for you both. But, if you don’t like it, then I will be very happy for this to become our ritual,” said Hannibal resting his forehead against Will’s. Will heard the door open but didn’t turn from Hannibal’s loose embrace as Hannibal called, “You’re giving your address to patients now?”

Will heard Mort laugh and stepped out of the nice cocoon of Hannibal’s arms. “I figured,” said Mort, “that if Will is going to snap and kill a psychiatrist it’s way more likely to be the one he’s in bed with than the one who lives in the same town as him. That’s just a mathematical probability.” The man locked the office’s main door and said, “Night.”

“Meet you at home,” Will said to Hannibal.

“If I beat you there I’ll let the dogs out.”

“Sounds good,” Will gave him one last kiss before walking down the street to his car. He drove down the quiet highway to Wolf Trap listening to Chris Ardoin and singing along. At home Hannibal was standing on his porch watching the dogs but with the house phone to his ear.

“Will’s here now,” said Hannibal as Will walked toward him. “I’m sorry, Will, I didn’t think. When I hear a phone, I answer it.” Will kissed him gently before taking the phone. He took Hannibal’s hand, watching the dogs.

“Hey, Daddy.”

“Hey, boy, you’re getting home late.”

“Yeah, I was at Mort’s but we rearranged it to be on your poker night from now on.”

“I don’t want to keep you because I saw you yesterday and it’s late to start dinner, but, Hannibal said you’re making voodoo pasta. So, should I drive right back to the airport?”

It wasn’t a joke, there was no humor in his words. “No, Daddy.”

“I can be with you in a few hours.”

“Daddy, you have work.”

“Honey, you are more important than any job. Voodoo pasta is your big guns distress food. Voodoo pasta is worrying.”

“Daddy, I wasn’t fine, earlier, I was having a hard time because I wasn’t prepared for the noise. But then I saw Mort, who gave me a plan. Now, I’m okay.” He told his father all about Mort’s plan. Hannibal was still by his side, rubbing his thumb over the back of Will’s hand. When he finished explaining he said, “I have safety nets. I understand that voodoo pasta scared you but I’m seeking the comfort I need. I didn’t wait for it to happen, I didn’t fall to pieces. I picked comfort food, shared my problem with a doctor and am going to follow his treatment plan. You don’t have to get on a plane; I promise. I’m okay. Once I get off the phone I’m going to teach Hannibal how to make the best comfort food I know and then we’re having an early night. I’m going to pet my dogs, take Hannibal to bed and sleep this off.”

“Okay,” agreed his dad. “If you’re sure.”

“Positive,” Will said.

“Then I’ll let you go cook.”

“Love you, Daddy,” Will said.

“Love you too, honey.”

He hung up and Hannibal said, “Will, I’m sorry. I had no idea that voodoo pasta was code for impeding breakdown. I think I panicked your father. If I had known I never would have said a word.”

“Hannibal, you pretended to be my boyfriend to cover for me. I know you wouldn’t have sold me out,” Will smiled at him. “We’re good.” He turned and whistled for the dogs who all trotted inside.

“Until I told your father you were making voodoo pasta I was unaware of how distressed you were,” Hannibal said, following Will into the kitchen.

“I was willing to settle for Thai food, remember? If I was really distressed I wouldn’t have given you an option.”

“On a scale of one to ten — one being fishing with the dogs on a cool but sunny afternoon, ten being getting screamed at by Jack Crawford while trapped in a small room with a body —

how distressed were you when you texted me?"

"High six, low seven," Will admitted. "But now I'm a two and I think I can get it down to a one by bedtime. It'll get worse again tomorrow but I think fortifying myself with voodoo pasta, going directly to bed and following Mort's advice tomorrow should bring it down to a manageable low four by tomorrow night which is where I am when my students are in class but no one has raised a hand." He studied Hannibal for a moment and then said, "You're a one. I've never felt that way about anyone I've dated. You're a one on that scale."

Hannibal smiled, "I never thought I could be so happy being told I'm a one on a scale of one to ten. But I'm thrilled. Now, show me how to make this so that if you hit an eight I can make it for you while you stroke a dog."

"You really are amazing."

"I endeavor to make my corner of the world better. You're a very important part of my world. What I do to make your life easier makes my world brighter."

Will kissed him, slowly gently, Hannibal's arms came around him and Will backed him up against the counter. He took his time, never rushing, never getting passionate. It was slow and gentle and when he finally pulled back he said, "I just hit one." He started to gather things and instructed Hannibal as they cooked together. The dogs came around to watch and Will smiled when Hannibal put on his new BeauSoleil CD.

When they sat down to dinner with buttered bread and delicious pasta Hannibal said, "I thought I would just gave to grit my teeth and smile but this is wonderful. It could only be improved by homemade pasta."

"Homemade pasta is not completely uniform and therefore not the ultimate comfort food for me. Exactness matter when I'm distressed. It's one of those little obsessive compulsive things. I used to have to count steps when I was distressed, and check the lights were off four times and lock, unlock, and relock the door four times. I had a pretty good therapist my senior year of high school who made those compulsions fade but I'd still prefer uniform fettucine."

Hannibal reached out and touched his hand, "I wish this world was easier for you but I wouldn't change you. I'm very hopeful about Mort's idea. What else did you discuss? Feel free to say it's none of my business."

Will told him about his new exercises, new plans and schedules, the notebook. Hannibal listened intently. "Mort told me he had always thought you didn't think much of him as a doctor. I told him you wouldn't have sent me if that were true."

"We practice very different medicine. His is no less beneficial than mine. That's why I like to hear about your treatment, I learn from it too. But, to be honest I simply like Mort, I thought if he wasn't a good fit for you than at least you would feel comfortable around him."

"JT says I find my people; you find yours too."

Hannibal was silent for a moment and then said, “I’ll tell you a secret, Will. It’s one few people know. But I did tell your father it.”

“You and my dad have secrets? I like that.”

Hannibal smiled at him. “I like very few people. You’re scared of people I simply don’t like them. I have respect for some people: the people at the opera house, Jimmy Price, several chefs. But I like very few. I can count the people I genuinely like on my fingers. I am a man with so many friends, some I find amusing, some interesting, some useful — but I don’t like them.”

“But you have them to dinner parties; you let them in your house.”

“I have served Jack Crawford and Frederick Chilton from my table; they both make my skin crawl. I simply like to keep those two in my eye line and being an affable host enables that endeavor.”

“But your dinner parties,” Will protested.

“I like dinner parties and being praised. I like seeing people eating meat I hunted. I don’t like the actual guests.”

“So, when you say you don’t care what they think of you,” Will said slowly.

“I mean it whole heartedly. You, Alana, Abigail, your father, Mort, my house keeper and Peter from Giant-Landover.” He counted them off and looked at his fingers, “Yes, that’s it.”

“Peter?” asked Will. “Someone in the meat department?” he guessed.

“No,” Hannibal shook his head, “the man who collects the carts. He wears a baby blue hate in the winter.”

Will knew him, a simpleminded, smiling man who always said hello. “He makes it to your list of seven people in the whole world?”

“Yes, he is kind, he was handed a terrible fate when he fell through the ice on a lake at the age of eight and was dead for seventeen minutes, he does his job to the best of his ability and he has never sought anything but a smile. I like Peter. His sister is a very pleasant and talented bright lawyer. I have no opinion about her except that she loves her brother and accepts him for who he is, never condescends to him but never raises her voice.”

“You’ve met his sister?”

“He was waiting for her to pick him up at closing time, she had car problems so I drove him home,” Hannibal shrugged. “It was nothing but that’s when I met her. He was a boy who got tossed aside by God like a churlish child breaking a toy. He shattered but he has done his best with what he has and he has succeeded.” He looked at Harry and said, “I don’t like animals at all, yet I care a great deal more for your dogs than I do for anyone other than the seven people I like. I seek their approval and care more about their physical wellbeing and happiness than I do most humans.”

“What about Beverly? She’s lovely.”

Hannibal thought for a few moments then said, “I think I could like Beverly and JT, you have a knack for picking people. But, having said that, it takes me a long, long time to care for someone. Abigail it was easier, because I saw her as a surrogate for my sister. That evolved into the feelings I have for her now. I like her for her, not as an ersatz sister. Alana, it took almost a year — she was a student; I kept her at arm’s length. Your father, I grew fond of through your stories, through your connection. I very nearly liked him before we met.”

“How long did it take you to like me?” asked Will, truly curious.

“You won’t like the answer,” said Hannibal. He took a bite of his food and after swallowing he said, “You’ll push me for it so I wanted another bite in case I offend you so deeply you kick me out.”

“How long?” repeated Will.

“About nine months. I intensely disliked you when we first met, intensely, the only reason I was friendly was because your mind was interesting and you gave me access to the FBI.”

“Nine months?” repeated Will. “You brought me breakfast when we were searching for Hobbs.”

“I like watching people eat what I cook.”

“Nine months?”

“You had that seizure at the crime scene. I felt responsible and got you a second neurologist. You didn’t want to go to the hospital and I felt responsible so I brought you here. And then being here, watching you try to attempt to care for your dogs, speaking to your father, seeing you in your house… that was when I actually crossed the boundary and liked you. When I got your air conditioners that was my first true overture of friendship based on caring. I cooked a burger with cheap meat to please you, that was my second act as someone who cared. I care more about your pleasure than about cooking. You are the most important, most treasured, person in my world. But I did not like you for nine months.”

“Wow,” said Will.

“Am I allowed to finish my meal or must I leave now?”

Will laughed, “You can stay.”

“Do you know why this meal is so good?”

“The perfect ratio of cream to kick,” Will said.

“No, we cooked it together and you taught me it.”

“We were friends,” Will said, still reeling.

“Yes,” Hannibal nodded.

“You took care of my dogs while I was out of town.”

“Friends do that for one another.”

“But you didn’t like me,” he said, “you drove an hour to take care of my dogs and you didn’t like me.”

“I have a lot of friends, Will, and I only like seven people. I dislike a great many of my friends but people consider me to be a good friend. Friends look after one another’s dogs. I took care of your dogs but I didn’t like you.” Hannibal shrugged again. “Have I hurt you?”

Will thought and said, “I don’t attempt friendship with people I don’t like. If you hadn’t brought breakfast I wouldn’t have even let you into my motel room that day. And you pushed the friendship. I liked you after about two months, long before you liked me. But, if it weren’t for your desire to be friends, despite not liking me, we wouldn’t be here. I never would have made the effort because I don’t seek friendship with people I don’t like and I don’t spend time getting to know people. I only like six people: you, Daddy, Abigail, Alana, Beverly and JT. But it strikes me as sadder that you only like seven people because you’re so sociable.”

“I am perfectly capable of enjoying a party when not a single one of you seven are around.”

Will smiled, “I liked you before you liked me. And I wanted you before you wanted me.”

“Emotionally or physically? Because, physically, I wanted you from the moment we met in Jack’s office.”

Will laughed at that, “Okay, so it’s a draw on that one. You wanted me in bed first and I wanted this long before you did. Conversations with my dad had become harder. I wanted what he believed to be true to be true.”

“It’s true now,” Hannibal said. “Isn’t that enough?”

“It’s more than enough,” Will said. “Much more than enough.”

They finished their dinner and Hannibal said, “Let’s skip coffee, you’re exhausted from the adrenaline of being at a high six, low seven all day. Let’s put the plates in the dishwasher and go to bed to curl up, you can do your new bedtime breathing and we’ll put today behind us.”

“That sounds amazing,” agreed Will. They left the pans to soak and put all the dishes in the dishwasher. They went to bed, curling together.

“Can you do your bed time breathing with me like this?” asked Hannibal.

Hannibal was holding him close, in a way that could only feel good when it was this man. “Yeah, I can breathe around you.” Will let himself drift, planning tomorrow and putting today behind him. He weighed it, feeling that on balance it had been a good day. Finishing the exercise he said, “I didn’t like the noise but I never saw Jack and I saw Hannibal.”

Hannibal sniffed, “Hm?” He asked it, clearly half asleep.

“I was talking to the universe, saying the worst and then the best parts of my day. I weigh the day and if it was more bad than good I say two bad things and one good. If it’s more good than bad I say one bad thing and two good. I didn’t like the noise. But I never saw Jack and I saw you.”

Hannibal held him a little tighter and Will allowed himself to sleep. He woke up to the noise of birds singing. He stayed still, registering the feel of Hannibal’s arm around his waist and the man’s face buried his neck. He breathed out and pictured the wall, painting it white. It took him fifteen minutes and Hannibal never woke up and when Will opened his eyes he sighed into Hannibal’s shoulder. He kissed the hard muscle and Hannibal spoke sleepily, “An incredible sensation on wake up to.”

“Morning,” Will said.

Hannibal ran his hands down Will’s rib cage. “You even feel gorgeous.” He lifted his head saying, “What time is it?”

Will looked at the bedside clock, “Six-thirty.”

“Excellent, there’s plenty of time.” He leaned up and then said, “Should I brush my teeth before I kiss you?”

“I don’t care if you don’t care.” Will replied. They kissed slowly and Will pulled Hannibal on top of him, enjoying the grounding sensation of Hannibal’s weight. Will sank into the feeling of pleasure and relaxation and groped in his drawer, hand seeking lube and a condom. They made out as Hannibal stretched him open. Will didn’t care about the morning breath. His body fit with Hannibal’s so well. They curled together and when Hannibal slid into him they stilled. “You feel so good,” Will moaned.

“Gorgeous, sexy man,” Hannibal responded. His fingers played over Will’s skin, gentle and fleeting as they moved together.

They moved and cuddled until Hannibal was stroking him hard. He fell to pieces in Hannibal’s arms and after only a few more sharp hip movements Hannibal dropped his head into Will’s neck. Will stroked his hands over Hannibal’s back. “Ever since that day Jack walked into my classroom, I’ve felt like water, all the time, continually moving over a stony riverbed, never stopping, never getting to look around or grip tight to anything. And then there’s you, you make me feel still.”

“Good. You need a break,” said Hannibal.

That made Will laugh and Hannibal slowly pulled away. “I’m going to go feed your dogs and make breakfast. You go shower.”

“You shower first, you have to leave before me. I’ll make us midweek waffles to celebrate waking up early without a phone call being involved.” Will sat up and wiped himself off with a dirty tee shirt.

“Waffles midweek, how decadent,” Hannibal said dryly.

“It’s not my fault that one of the only seven people you like was brought up on food stamps,” Will said with a shrug. “Midweek waffles are celebration food.”

Hannibal kissed his forehead before finally getting up and removing the condom. “I would enjoy a celebratory waffle very much.”

Will followed him into the bathroom to brush his teeth then pulled on his robe and let the dogs out. He set the waffle iron to warm up and made the batter before making the coffee to ensure it would still be piping hot when Hannibal finished in the bathroom. He took a picture of the batter sitting next to waffle iron with his phone and sent it to his dad with a caption, “I know you were worried by my desire for comfort food last night but, I think we both know, I wouldn’t be making waffles on a weekday if I wasn’t in a pretty good mood.”

He hit send and poured in the first waffle before making a salad with finely diced cantaloupe, honeydew, lemon juice and honey. Unlike Hannibal he didn’t worry about the dogs who were going in and out as he ground the coffee. He didn’t mind a few scratches when Calvin climbed his leg to watch. His nails were well clipped blunt and clean. His phone chirped and he glanced at it. His dad had written, “I’d be happier if the batter was holding up today’s newspaper, like a ransom proof-of-life picture but this will suffice.”

Will laughed and went to his junk mail. Grabbing an envelope informing him he “might already be a winner” he took a pen and wrote down the date in big numbers. He propped it next to the iron and took another picture sending it with the text, “I couldn’t have staged this in advance. Knowing the date I would need to assure you I’m okay is not something I can foresee. You know I don’t get the paper.”

The text back said, “I’m pleased you’re okay. I’m going to call you, just briefly, tonight before I go to poker. I just want to make sure you’re alright.”

“Okay, have a good day, Daddy,” he texted back. He was smiling as he made the coffee and Hannibal came in fully clothed.

“You’re smiling,” he observed.

“My dad’s being very droll,” Will responded. He flipped the first waffle out onto a plate and poured more batter into the iron. Hannibal held up the dated envelope and raised an eyebrow and Will said, “Proof that I’m making waffles on a weekday and am clearly happy.”

“Just as Voodoo pasta is a sign of unhappiness, celebratory waffles are actually a celebration?” asked Hannibal, clarifying the situation. “You weren’t joking when you said that?”

“Midweek waffles are joyful, Hannibal. I wouldn’t joke about that. I made fruit salsa… I think it’s salsa, is salsa based on chunk size?”

“No,” Hannibal shook his head and took a spoon from the counter. He tried a bite of the stuff and sighed, “That’s salsa and delicious.”

Will smiled and held out the plate. “Fix that the way you like.”

Hannibal moved to stand behind him and kissed his neck, “You smell wonderful.”

“You’re going to get my smell on you and undo the work of your shower.”

“It will be so faint, I’ll be the only one to notice and I can enjoy the scent of you all day.” He ran his free hand up and down Will’s abdomen. He kisses his neck, licked him from his ear down his neck to his clavicle and said, “You taste better than the salsa.”

Will leaned back into Hannibal’s shoulder. He turned his head for a kiss and said, “A cold celebratory waffle isn’t worth celebrating.”

Hannibal laughed and slowly moved away, adding the salsa to his waffle. “Tonight is my late night. I was going to sleep at home but if speaking to the construction workers doesn’t help please call me. I would much rather drive over here very late than have you spend a night by yourself when you’re distressed.”

“You’re a really good boyfriend,” said Will.

“I mean it,” Hannibal said stroking the back of his neck with one hand as he picked up a knife with the other. He moved to the table.

“Don’t let it go cold,” he said, pouring them both coffee. Will placed one in front of Hannibal at the table and asked, “Do you date much, Hannibal?”

“I’ve never thought much of the rather American notion of casual dating. If you’re dating someone you shouldn’t be dating anyone else,” Hannibal responded. He took a bite and said, “That is delicious. I don’t understand the idea of discussing being exclusive. To my mind, one should date a single person at a time. Do you disagree with that?”

“I’m so bad at dating a single person attempting to date more than one would give me a stroke.” Will shook his head, “I meant, do you date habitually?”

“I’ve never had a problem finding someone for my arm. Usually, my relationships only last a few months. Once I dated a man for a year. Why?”

“Did you like them? Because you don’t like people.”

“Ah, we’re still on that, I see.” Hannibal thought for a few moments then said, “No, I’ve only liked one other person I’ve dated… and she broke me so badly I didn’t trust anyone for twelve years.”

“How long were you together?” asked Will.

“One night. It only took one night and a rough morning for her to shatter my world. I was eighteen and still quite innocent. You and she are the only people I ever seen romantically whom I cared about.”

“I’m sorry about her,” Will said, “but I can’t imagine not liking someone and having sex with them. I find sex so stressful that I could never do it. I’m bad enough in the bedroom as it is,” The second waffle finished and he covered it in the fruit salad and sat down across from Hannibal.

“You’re great in the bedroom,” replied Hannibal.

“Only with you,” Will responded.

Hannibal smiled at him over his coffee cup, “I’d take you back to bed right this moment and prove it but we both have jobs.” He took a bite of his waffle and chewed, thinking. After swallowing his said, “You find it odd that I date when I don’t like people. I find it odd that you force yourself to have sex when you find it distressing.”

“You have to have sex to keep a relationship going,” Will shrugged. “I liked the people I dated. I wanted to keep dating them.”

“We don’t have to have sex,” said Hannibal. “I find your body very attractive but I like all of you. Sex isn’t as important as being close to you.”

“One of the first things my dad noticed and liked about you was that, when you touch me, I don’t flinch. I like physical contact with you; I like sex with you.”

“Excellent,” Hannibal replied. They ate their waffles and Hannibal sighed, “It’s back to the mines, sadly.”

“Yeah, I better go shower,” agreed Will.

Hannibal drained his coffee cup and said, “I finish at ten tonight. I’ll call you and if you want me to come home I will.”

Will thought and said, “If it goes really badly I’ll text you and say to skip the call and just come home, if it goes well I’ll wait until you call just to say goodnight but, if it’s a mixed bag, I’ll probably want to go to bed early so I’ll text you.”

“I like that idea, a proactive plan,” Hannibal smiled.

“Self-care isn’t selfish, that’s what Mort says anyway.”

“He is wholly correct; taking care of yourself is important,” Hannibal kissed him. “Taking care of yourself is responsible. I hope you have a nice day. But, if not, I’ll see you tonight.”

Will smiled, “Have a good day.”

Once he was gone, Will showered, dressed and patted the boys goodbye. He walked over the fields and heard the noises of the construction crew starting their work. Squaring his shoulders, he soldiered on. His students weren’t there and he opened his briefcase. He sorted everything out and had his whole slide deck queued up before they came in. His morning went well, it was pleasant to talk without being interrupted, listing off information to his students scribbling notes. It was nice at lunch he walked home, let the dogs out and ate half a

sandwich while they played. He did his breathing exercise at the kitchen table. He drove back to work, making sure he could make a quick run to Dunkin' Donuts. His class started well enough but fifteen minutes in Jack walked into the room. Jack loudly told Will's students to leave and Will felt his temperature rise.

Once they were alone he said, "They're the future of the FBI, Jack, every time you cancel my class that future dims just a little."

"I doubt missing a class will make much a difference. You're not God's gift to forensics."

"You certainly find me invaluable or else you would accept that three doctors have told you I'm not fit for the field. I'm not battle ready. So, please, if you don't think I'm God's gift get out of my classroom and let me be just a teacher." When Jack didn't move Will said, "I have an appointment in Wolf Trap at 5:15 that I can't miss. It's nonnegotiable. So, what are we looking at?"

"A chain of gang related deaths."

"That's not your wheelhouse."

"It's my jurisdiction," said Jack.

"Why not leave it to David Micah's team. This is their thing."

"Micah's team is working in Detroit and we don't have any cases."

Will shrugged. "You've got a lot of cold cases. Or do you not like to admit that you don't solve them all?" It was a low blow. He got his elbow in, adding, "How's the search for the Chesapeake Ripper going?"

"Will, cut it out," the tone was sharp and Will tried not to flinch outwardly. He didn't want Jack to know just how much the man frightened him. Jack continued, "I need your mind."

Will squared his shoulders, "I'm already using it, Jack." Jack stood his ground, trying to force Will to make eye contact. Will packed his briefcase to avoid looking at the man, "I have my car here because of my appointment. Where are we going?"

"Washington Highlands."

"We're going to look at a gang killing in the middle of gangland?" Will sighed and snapped his briefcase closed, "What's the address?" When Jack told him he nodded, "I'll see you there but I have to leave by 4:30, it's unavoidable."

He walked out before Jack could comment. He drove with his music playing, happy that he car was a beaten-up '97 model. No one would try to steal it. He breathed slowly in and out. Focusing on the fact that he'd built in his out, he would leave at 4:30 and if Jack argued he would give him Mort's card. He texted Mort just to give him a heads up before getting out at the scene. There was already a cordon in place but he saw Jimmy and gave the man a wave. When Jimmy nodded back, Will got quickly ushered under the tape. He walked through the

dark dilapidated building, once a store now just a shell, carved out by poverty and the money moving away from this sad corner of the city.

There was the victim, a young black man with a cross cut into his cheek, the mark of the Latin Jesuses. He got a better look at the face and readjusted the label for the victim, not a young black man at all, a kid. Will looked at his nails, shoes and wrist. It was a real case of the wrong place at the wrong time. Jack came in but Will was too busy to acknowledge him.

Zeller started talking, a scenario that he thought had happened, Will felt his skin get hot and tight. The words, "food stamps," "drug dealer," "kids like these," made his chest hurt.

And when the man said, "Got sick of the government cheese, 'cause it's pretty bad, and he wanted to make some money," That was when Will reached the breaking point.

And when he finally spoke it came out like blood from a brutal cut, an arterial spray of vitriol. "Shut up, right now. Stop talking. Just stop. We ever walk into a scene with an upper middle class Jewish kid who knew he was going to college and never went to bed hungry, please speak up. But you are so wrong it would be laughable if you weren't an FBI agent. As you are speaking from a place of power, it's terrifying. Right off the bat, I can tell you that the caliber of your grilled cheeses growing up didn't have a patch on mine. You were somewhere in suburbia with Kraft cheese on whole grain bread. I had government cheese. And, no, it wasn't 'pretty bad.' It was amazing, no other American cheese could ever compete. It was designed to melt perfectly with tons of taste. It made amazing mac'n'cheese. And more importantly it let my dad who made three bucks and thirty-five cents an hour feed his four kids protein and calcium and let your parents buy milk at a steady price. The only people who insult it are the people who never tried it. And as for his getting sick of government cheese? They haven't made it since the nineteen-nineties. So stop talking." He looked at the coroner as he snapped on gloves and said, "May I touch the body? I want to check his ID."

"He doesn't have a wallet," said Jimmy.

"He's a young teen. In this area, at night? If he was my son he wouldn't have a wallet," Will said and pulled off his shoes and instantly hit pay dirt. "Daniel Blue was in eighth grade," he held up the school ID, "and a card carrying A honor roll student," he held up the laminated paper card that apparently gave a person discounts. "The honor roll was important to him or he wouldn't transfer it to his shoe when he couldn't use his wallet. He was the most responsible kid in his family, maybe the oldest, maybe not," he said holding up the SNAP card. "You don't give the family's food money to the weakest link." Looking at a prescription sheet and Medicaid card he said, "Last night, he was walking to a pharmacy to pick up antibiotics for Mercy Blue, probably a younger sister. This must be the fastest route from his house. She probably gave him this," he lifted the boy's wrist and pointed to the pink and purple friendship bracelet. "Going by the skill of the knots she's probably about seven. Mom must work nights, she'd get this if she could but he was here last night." He sniffed the boy's sleeve and said, "That's industrial cleaner, so Mom does laundry somewhere and puts their clothes in at the same time." He removed five dollars from under the insole of the knock off Adidas and said, "They're either dirt poor or there are a lot of siblings. This is his emergency money. I carried five bucks: enough for bus fare home and a sandwich. Twenty years later,

five bucks can't cover that. He's certainly not dealing drugs and no gang member would wear fake Adidases. Fake Nikes, or stolen real ones. No, poor Daniel just cut through the wrong abandoned building. He's an honor roll kid who went to get his sister her meds."

"You think she's a single mom?" asked Jack.

"I do. It's definitely a one income family. And his well-kept appearance suggests that the adult in his life tries hard. There's no drunk loser at his home. No, this is a single parent doing their best. His level of hygiene suggests a mom. Good single dads care about if the kid is fed and still in school, not necessarily whether or not the kids bathe. Women put more stock in cleanliness than men in general. I could be wrong, some single dads are amazing. But, my dad's amazing and there were times when I was a smelly kid because I was a teenage boy and no one was forcing me to get in a shower. You can probably find out through the SNAP card, it has a code in it. And those things are impossible to lie on. There's less than a three percent fraud rate in that system. I think people are so afraid of the stigma — of being accused of being lazy or in it for the government cheese," he glared at Zeller as he said that, "that people who aren't desperate don't apply. The government can change the name and the format but it's still food stamps and, as Zeller just showed us, people are just as judgmental and cruel about SNAP as they were about stamps. Daniel's parent will have a job doing laundry at night." He checked his watch and said, "It's your jurisdiction because he's a kid but it's not a gang killing. Boys who carry the family's SNAP card and wear friendship bracelets aren't in gangs. He was killed by someone in the Latin Jesuses but only because he walked the wrong way. You should find her fast, Mercy needs her meds and Mom needs the SNAP card if Mercy's gonna eat tonight." He shrugged, "I gotta go."

"Where?" said Jack.

"I told you; I have an appointment at 5:15."

"I have a dead eighth grader; you're just going to have to miss your appointment."

Will shook his head, "I gave you the biggest break when I took off his shoes. I have nothing else for you. You might be willing to ignore the fact that my doctor says I'm not fit for the field but I'm not willing to ignore the fact that he ordered me to go to this appointment. If you want to argue about it, you can take it up with him." He fished his wallet out of his pocket and got one of Mort's cards. "I've got to go." He didn't wait for a response, just left. Outside he removed his gloves and threw them in a garbage can out on the street as he walked to his car. His music started and he put on his seatbelt on. There was a knock at the window and he sighed. Turning his head, he expected to see Jack but it was Beverly. He opened the window says, "Beverly, I wasn't joking. I've got to go."

"I know; I just wanted to check you're okay."

That made him smile, he scanned her face, briefly making eye contact and saw she really was concerned. "People think if you work at the FBI must be hardened. That poor boy in his knock off Adidases, out in the middle of the night to help his sick sister, will haunt my dreams tonight. But I'll be okay. Thank you for asking."

She smiled, “That’s good. But I am hardened, so I was actually asking about Zeller back there.”

“Oh, it makes my blood boil that he could a judge a child based on the location of his death. And I think if it was a white boy on the floor Zeller’s first thought wouldn’t have been drug dealer. I think that Zeller should be ashamed of himself. But, if you mean am I upset because of how he would have felt about me as a child?” he paused, thinking about it. “When we were kids his mom would have probably been one of the nice ladies who cooked my family dinner. And he would have felt smug about it, as though he was the one who had done us a kindness. And he would have made fun of my misspelled Keds and my brother’s mullet and he wouldn’t have let me pet his dogs. But now? Am I upset or hurt? If you get away from racism, religion and sexuality, society still judges people on things. I’m richer than Zeller, I’m smarter than Zeller, I’m more widely revered in my field and I’m better looking. I win, Beverly, I win on every level. And I win at life because I’ve got seven beautiful dogs and I don’t need a SNAP card. The only thing that’s changed is that I think he’s a total dick and a little racist. But that’s only slightly worse than I thought this morning, because before I thought he was an ass. I gotta go to, Beverly. Thank you, for being a nice person and checking.”

“You’re a weird one, Will, but I’m glad you’re winning at life. Good luck with your mysterious appointment.”

“I’ll tell you about it later,” he said as she stepped away from the car. He went to Dunkin' Donuts, bought the coffee and doughnuts and drove in silence, using one of Mort’s breathing tricks to ready himself for the meeting.

When he parked and got out he felt almost calm. He smiled at a man who had a clip board and was going through a supply crate. The man smiled back but said, “We have noise clearance until seven-thirty. I can show you the paperwork if you like and I promise you won’t hear a whisper after that.”

“No,” he said, going around the car to get to the food, “I’m Will Graham. I’m the future owner of the house you’re building. I came over to introduce myself.”

“You brought snacks,” said the guy.

“I did,” agreed Will.

“I’ll introduce you around, I’m Evan, I’m the onsite foreman.” Will followed Evan to where there was a frame all set up with men working around it. “We’re far too close to the water here for a basement so this is your foundation. And this is the team.” Will was glad he was carrying the food; he didn’t need to shake hands, of the last man Evan said, “This is Léonce, he’s an electrician specialist, he’s also a jack of all trades with very steady hands. So, even though we’re nowhere near wiring, he’s here. His English isn’t so great but he’s an awesome guy. Léonce, this is Will Graham, the owner of the house.”

“Hello,” said Léonce and his accent gave him away instantly.

“Bonjou,” replied Will.

“You speak Louisiana Creole?” asked the man raising an eyebrow.

Will nodded, “Manman m ' te Kreyòl. Li se premye fwa mwen ak lang.”

“What?” said Evan, looking confused,

“My mother was Creole and it’s my first language; it’s what we spoke at home. I worked down at the docks in New Orleans for years, a lot of the mechanics down there spoke very little English.”

“Will Graham,” repeated Léonce.

“Si-fe,” agreed Will.

“Richard Graham is vou pèr?”

“Si-fe,” agreed Will again, confirming his father’s identify.

The man’s face lit up, “Gaétan Chervais is mô pèr!”

Will felt his mouth break into a smile, “Mondjé!”

“What?” asked Evan again.

“I know Léonce’s dad really well, he drove me and my dad to work every day when I was a mechanic at the docks. This house is actually for my dad, when he retires from the docks. I live over there, through the woods,” he pointed. He quickly repeated it in Creole to Léonce, that his dad was retiring to the house.

“The pretty house covered in ivy?” asked Evan.

“That’s mine, and it’s the only other house for about two miles. I wouldn’t worry about making too much noise for the neighbors; I’m the only neighbor to disturb.”

“It’s so nice of you to come say ‘Hi,’” said Evan.

Will shrugged, “I actually wanted to help. I was a boat mechanic. I know it’s different but, is there anything, little I can do?”

Léonce answered for Evan, “Wiring kit boxes never ship in the right order, boats or houses.”

“I can sort a wiring kit,” said Will, “if that’s okay with you, Evan?”

“That is real grunt work,” said Evan.

Will nodded, “We used to use it as a punishment down at the docks. But I don’t mind it and I don’t want to work on anything I could actually mess up.”

“Well, if you’re sure, that would be useful,” said Evan.

“I really want to help build my dad’s dream house, but I also don’t want to screw up my dad’s dream house.”

Evan laughed as Will put down the coffee and doughnuts, then followed Evan to boxes. The man handed him three, “Get through what you can; give up when you’re bored.”

Will nodded, looking at the packaging he said, “This is the same brand of wiring kit we used on the nicer yachts.”

“It’s going to be a nice house.”

“It’s his dream house,” Will said. He smiled at the boxes and settled down. It was pure muscle memory. The box was just a jumble of wires and parts and specialized tool kits. The guys were talking about their kids and they asked if he had any kids. “Seven dogs,” he responded. “I have lovely boys. But no children.”

“What do you do? Do you work at the docks here?”

“I teach forensics at the FBI academy and consult on serial killer profiles,” said Will.

“When I move here for this job,” said Léonce, “mô pèr say ‘Call Will: he live there now.’ I say, ‘He at docks?’ he say, ‘FBI.’ And I laugh because FBI and construction work don’t mix.”

“Why not? I’m exactly the same person I was. The only difference is that I’m using my college education instead of what I learned at my father’s knee. Vou pèr is one of the nicest, most generous men I’ve ever met. If you’d called me, I would have suggested a barbeque.”

“How does a guy go from the docks to the FBI?” asked a guy called Miles.

Léonce looked embarrassed. He knew what Will was going to say. “I was a cop, I worked CSI forensics, I let a bad guy get away. A real bad guy, the Butcher of Bourbon Street. I felt so guilty that I left the police force and went to the docks and then I got a higher degree while at the docks and got recruited by the FBI.” It glossed over the situation quite nicely. He finished a box and closed the lid and moved onto the next one. The topic went back to children and Will worked while listening. As he finished the second box and put it aside his phone rang. He stood up as he answered it, stretching as he did so. “Hey, Daddy.”

“Hey, honey, how was going to the construction site?”

“I’m still at your future home. Guess who is working on your house.”

“Gandhi?” guessed his dad.

“You always guess Gandhi,” said Will. “Here, say hi.” He held the phone out to Léonce.

Léonce took it and said, “Bonswá, Richard. This is Léonce, Gaétan Chervais’s gaçon.” He laughed at something and moved away, still holding Will’s phone. Will started in on the third box.

“What time do you guys knock off?” asked Will.

“Seven-thirty,” said Evan.

“Good to know,” said Will. “I work kind of crazy hours. But, would it be okay if I come help out every once in a while?”

“You’ve already sorted two of the dozens of wiring kits we need,” laughed Evan. “You’re welcome to do unskilled labor any time you like.”

“Great,” said Will, and refocused on his task as he sat back down.

It was only a few minutes later when Léonce came back with his phone. “Vou pèr envi parliaj.”

Will smiled and took the phone back. “Hey.”

“So, that must be a relief,” said his dad. “A person you know to have a trustworthy and nice father is working with the folks too close to your house.”

“Yeah,” agrees Will. “I’m sorting wire kits, the same brand we use on yachts.”

“Why don’t wiring kits come presorted?” asked his dad rhetorically.

“No idea, but it’s nice and easy and I won’t screw it up.”

His dad laughed and said, “How are you doing?”

“I’m really good. It’s fun to help.”

“Good, if you’re okay I’m going to go to go to poker. So are you okay?”

“Yeah, I’m good. I hope you have a good time at poker.”

“Always do, but if you want to call me, I’ll have my phone on.”

“Okay, don’t lose too much money.”

“We bet pennies, honey. The very worst that can happen, if I lose every cent I walk in with, is that I lose very little.”

“Have fun.”

“You too, honey.”

“Thanks, Daddy.”

“Love you, honey.”

“Love you too,” he said, unembarrassed in front of the new people. A person embarrassed by admissions of love was someone who didn’t truly love. He hung up and said, “It’s poker night. I always worry on poker night.”

“You’ve never attended?” asked Léonce.

Will shook his head, “I thought they would prefer it if I didn’t. They want to talk about their kids. My being there stops that.”

“They all put in three dollars; they can only lose three dollars. Bets are a penny.”

“My dad always says they bet pennies, I thought he meant they make small bets.”

“Non, un sou.”

“That makes me feel better.” He counted connectors as he put them into their slot. People discussed their dinner plans. And when asked his plans Will said, “My boyfriend is a gourmand. He’s working late so I get to have a frozen burrito without getting comments and my dogs can sleep in my bed. I love spending time with Hannibal but I also love burritos and my dogs.”

“My wife won’t let me eat hot mustard. She says brushing my teeth doesn’t help,” said a guy called Dave. No one made any comments or grimaced at his mention of a boyfriend.

“Two nights a week, Hannibal stays at his place and I can have chicken fingers, Lucky Charms, pizza, Hot Pockets and all stuff that makes him sigh heavily.” That made the guys laugh. Will checked the tool kit and organized the wires as the guys talked about what they were having. Finally, he shut the lid. “I better go check on my dogs. Thank you for letting me help.”

“You were helpful, thanks for stopping by. Come anytime you like.”

“Great,” Will said, standing and wiping off his pants, this dress pants were dirty but they were also machine washable. “I’ll see you guys soon.”

“Night, Will,” they chorused.

He drove home and two Hot Pockets and a deconstructed salad… well, raw carrots and ranch dressing. He played with the dogs and played fetch with multiple balls and toys. It was fun and the evening was warm and still. He sat on the porch in sweats and a UC Boulder sweatshirt that was riddled with holes from too many trips through the washing machine. His cell phone rang and he sighed heavily. He looked at the screen and saw it was Beverly. He answered saying, “Hey, Beverly.”

“Hey, how did your appointment go?”

“Well, really well, how was your evening?”

“I’ve been at work, I am exhausted. The cafeteria closed about an hour ago and I need coffee. I was hoping I could come to you and have you pour some down my throat. But, I know you like space and boundaries so it’s fine if you don’t want me to invite myself over. I understand that you are a private person and it’s pretty late. I’ll go to Starbucks.”

He laughed, “I haven’t had my last cup for the day. I’ll grind the beans and I’ll put the kettle on in five minutes if that’s good.”

“You are a good person. I’ll leave here now and see you soon.”

“I’m already in PJs and I’m not changing.”

“Will, you could be naked, if you’ll make me coffee and not make me drive more than a mile, I’m happy.”

“See you in ten minutes,” he said. He went inside and started to sort out the coffee. Calvin climbed his leg to watch the grinder and Will glanced around. “You will never understand how dearly I love you all.” He poured the coffee into the pot and leaned down to kiss them each on the top of the head. “You boys are my best friends. And, no, that’s not pathetic: it’s awesome.” He straightened and filled the kettle. There was a knock at the door as Will put the kettle on the heat.

He went to the door and looked out the peep hole before opening it for Beverly. “Evening.”

“Thank you for this, Will, Starbucks is too far for me to make it,” she sighed.

He chuckled and said, “Come inside.”

“Did you go to Boulder?” she asked.

“Undergrad,” he nodded. They went into the kitchen as the whistle blew and he poured the boiling water over the grounds.

“How did your appointment go?” she asked.

“Jack disregards what’s important to other people and he ignores my medical problems. The construction on my land made me so nervous and agitated that my doctor told me to go meet the construction works and work with them to make me less scared. Jack would mock that. I went over, sorted three wiring kits and got to know them. It turns out that I know one of the guys… well, kinda, I know his dad really well. It’s less scary now. It was nice. Did you find Mrs. Blue?”

Beverly nodded, “Poor woman.”

She didn’t expand upon it so Will poured the coffee and said, “Milk or sugar?”

“No, black’s good.”

He pulled out cookies and candy. “I can’t do deserts.”

“You don’t have to do anything, thank you.”

“You don’t need to keep thanking me. This is what friends do.” Buster jumped into his lap. “There’s my boy.” He stroked him gently. “Who is one of the best dogs ever?” He sipped his

coffee and said, “Do you think Jack’s going to drag me back in? I don’t want to get dragged back in.”

“I don’t think so, he had skin under his nails. We’ll find him. You don’t need to come back in.”

“Poor little kid,” Buster made a whiny noise, “Not you, Buster. You’re fine.”

“Run me through their names again? I know Buster, Harry and Winston.”

He repeated the introductions and said, “It’s good of you to try and learn them.”

“They’re kind of your children.”

“Yeah, they are,” he agreed. "They're good boys."

End Notes

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